1: Warner E-5 (1926-1929) 1937
OI 17 Murngin OI 17

basis of their inherent nature of being Dua or Yiritja, but that the moiety grouping of things takes on spatial definitions and specific location. The importance of the intertwining of these two concepts can be seen in the larger myths such as Wawilak, Djunkgao, Barnumbir, which reflect their division of the things of nature and culture into two moiety categories and group the objects of nature accordingly because they are the property of the clans. The clans are thought of as owning their totems and the right to certain minute variations of the ritual. The ownership of the land includes the use of it, but there would be no thought of excluding the members of other clans from using it; rather, mutual use would be encouraged if the two groups were friendly.

The objects of the technology are personally owned, but a number of brothers and fathers and sons who have cooperated in an enterprise such as boat building have a feeling of collective ownership (see pages 63, 70).

The concept of incorporeal property is not very highly developed. A man's name is his own, but other members of his clan could possess it if their parents or grandparents who named them had wished it so. There are no songs or painting designs, curing or killing magics, which are considered, as elsewhere, the property of any one individual or group. Certain totemic designs are associated with clans or moieties, and it would be impossible for members of the other clans or moiety to use these designs or emblems unless given permission under special circumstances; but these as well as totems and rituals are not so much properties in an economic sense as integral parts of the structure of the clan. To a great degree this is also true of the land. To remove these incorporeal elements from the clan and moiety structures would cause a complete reorganization of those structures, and only in a most secondary and derivative sense can they be thought of as in an economic category; yet the effect of their being part of the clan and moiety configuration has many of the attributes of our concept of property.

The Murngins' undeveloped sense of property seems to be associated with their lack of interest in developing their technological equipment, and both of these social elements seem to root in the desire to be free from the burdens and responsibilities of objects which would interfere with the society's itinerant existence. The equivalents of incorporeal property in other tribes are here felt to be part of the clan or moiety, i.e., not objects for the exclusive use of any one individual group to dispose of as it saw fit. The medicine man's magical ritual

1: Warner E-5 (1926-1929)1937
OI 17 Murngin OI 17

424 is a possible exception since he alone can exercise his magic; but here
786 too the feeling is not so much of ownership as of having obtained his magical equipment by inherent ability combined with a mystic experience. In the west the magician's power can be passed from father to son, or to some extent from mother's brother to sister's son, and a man can acquire his magical rituals from others; but essentially the concept of magical power is much like our modern concept of talent and ability.

435 The governing principle in the evaluation of objects which will be kept permanently by their owner is the ease with which they can be transported by human carriage or dugout canoe. The amount of labor consumed in their manufacture contributes in some degree to their high value as individual property, and the relative scarcity of an object in nature or in trade also makes its contributions to Murngin economic values; but the final desideratum is the relative ease of transportation [492] of the article, since this society has no domesticated beast of burden. Metal containers obtained in trade with white missionaries are extremely scarce and highly prized; yet if of very large size they will be given to someone remaining in camp or cut up and put to other uses.

181 The ultimate value is freedom of movement. Basically the largest
484 factor contributing to this value is the shifting food supply which necessitates change of location; but the feeling for change of location permeates the whole society and has become the most positive motivating factor in the thinking of any Australian aborigine, including the Murngin. All the white ranchers and frontier settlers know and have to make allowance for the partially acculturated blacks' uncontrollable desire "to take a walk about," chiefly under the compulsion of movement from place to place but also because of love for homeland and native culture. The desire to go to other places is forever present in the mental constitution of a black's behavior. If he is in his own clan land where he was born and where he grew to maturity—the center of his cultural heritage—he still feels the urge to go to the next horde or food ground. A flexible material culture and a like technological equipment must, and do, form his adaptation to the natural environment.

(For further consideration of this economic problem, particularly from the point of view of the selection or rejection of exotic articles from other cultures, the reader should see Appendix I, Social Change in North Australia.)

181 It might be argued that the factor of transportation did not prevent
796 a luxuriant growth of ceremonial paraphernalia, such as totemic emblems, grave posts, ceremonial objects of dress, etc. Although the native

1; Warner E-5 (1926-1929) 1937
OI 17 Murngin OI 17

CHAPTER VII

MURNGIN MAGIC AND MEDICINE

DESCRIPTION OF MURNGIN MAGIC, WITH DETAILED DATA

A. Introduction

Among all the clans of the eight tribes and all the members of the groups there is a profound belief in magic. The effects of its power are twofold: it can harm and destroy, or it can benefit and cure. Among the northern clans of the Murngin and Yaernungo tribes there is a belief in magic but there are no magicians of any kind, while among the southern and more western tribes magicians, both evil and good, are found everywhere. The "black" magician (sorcerer) can injure or kill his victim, and the "white" magician can cure him or restore his lost faculties. All deaths, sicknesses, certain types of bad luck, and, in general, all those occasions on which the individual is seriously out of adjustment with his community, physically, mentally, or socially, are looked upon as the effects of black magic; and in almost every case except that of soul-stealing the white magician is called in to remedy the situation.[1] There is here a kind of warfare between the forces which do good and those which do harm to man. The latter are related to an organized set of concrete techniques embodied in the person of the black magician, while an entirely different set gives practical expression, in the personality of the white magician, to those forces which control the effects of black magic. The struggle then becomes a warfare between these two types of magical personalities. This does not mean that they are necessarily enemies, though they usually are; furthermore, a black magician is not looked upon by all men as fearsome: to those of his own group he is a constant source of strength, since they seek his aid in repaying a wrong done to them by another group.

Occasionally when a very old person dies the diagnosis is, "It was nothing, just old age"; but this is very rare. Among some of the magical causes are: the machinations of an evil magician; possession by an

[1] Whenever a magician, black or white, is called upon, payment must be made to him.

1: Warner E-5 (1926-1929)1937
OI 17 Murngin OI 17

754 and the magician twists his tongue so that the top of it lies on the bottom of the mouth and the reverse side faces the palate. He is told that in three days—but there is no particular set time or magical number—he will die: "The first day you will be very happy, the next day you will be sick, and the third day you will die." After he leaves the spot where the operation has taken place, the magician runs ahead, hides, and waits for him, hits him with a club and cuts his body in two. One part of the body flies in the air in one direction and the other in the opposite. They become like leaves in the wind and disappear.[4] Several hundred feet away they reappear and the body becomes whole again. This process is repeated a number of times until the victim is near his camp, to which he returns. The magician sneaks away in the bush and returns to his own camp.

The man who has lost his soul feels very weak. His wives ask if he has had his soul stolen, and he says, "Oh, no, I have had dysentery, and I am very sick from it." The first day he feels very well, finds an abundance of food and seems very cheerful; the second day he sickens, and the third day he dies. A "white" magician is then called by the 756 relatives to ascertain who has been responsible. He looks at the dead 781 man to see what spirits are standing beside him, for the spirits of the killers are nearly always to be found by their victim's corpse, though only medicine men can see them. The doctor then announces the name of the killer and the relatives discuss the best way of avenging the death.

754 When a woman is killed the operation is considerably different. The rope is placed around her neck, she is dragged from the camp to a hiding place in the jungle, a fire is built, a paper-bark or basket receptacle is made ready, and green ants, a lizard and an orchid bulb are collected; but instead of making an incision below the heart the magician enters the body of the woman through her vagina. In operating on a man the magician faces his victim in a squatting position, but in opening a woman he works from the side with his legs pressed together for fear sexual desire will overcome his magic.

He has the killing stick in his palm. The skin around the Mount of Venus is pushed back until it reaches the navel. The magician inserts his hand in the vaginal orifice, goes forward when the woman inhales and keeps his hand quiet when she exhales. The woman is kept in a

[4] The word "warro" means leaf, also house, as well as the soul. The warro (soul) makes a malli or shade. A leaf does the same thing. This is possibly the association of ideas which gives the two the same name. Houses are shelters and are made of leaves.

1: Warner E-5 (1926-1929)1937
OI 17 Murngin OI 17

754 anything that a man or woman has been eating are carefully picked up and hidden.

754 514 The magicians are believed to take the excrement at times and place it in a fire where there are hot stones which are supposed to make the victim very ill; at other times it is placed between the limbs of two trees, as are the pieces of refuse; the rubbing of the branches causes a sore in the victim's throat.

C. White Magic and the Healer

755 White magic is an effective force used to cure sickness, heal wounds, take away the malignant effect of a snake bite, and, in general, to remove from the individual a feeling of dysphoria and to give him a sense of well-being and adjustment to his community.

The white magician usually performs this function and applies this power. He can remove foreign objects which have been shot into the body of the sick man, and diagnose on the principle that the patient can live if the cause of illness is only a foreign object, but must die if his soul is stolen.

756 *Individuality and Social Personality of the White Magician.*—The individuality of the white magician is not different from that of the ordinary man. The only noticeable tendency in all the observed healers was their joviality and pleasantness in their ordinary social relations. There were no indications of the psychopathic personality, for psychologically and physically they were a very normal group.

The social personality of the healer is different from that of the ordinary man's only because of his additional magical powers; otherwise he participates in the culture much the same as anyone else. He marries, has children, hunts, fishes, fights, and enters the ceremonial life in a manner no different from that of other men. There is but one [184] rigid taboo on his behavior: he canont submerge himself in salt water without losing his power. Evidence is conflicting as to the existence of [262] food taboos. If there are such, they were not observed nor did the magicians admit any. The most successful healers were observed eating the foods which some of the evidence claimed were taboo to them. The reason for the belief in such restrictions seems to be that during their novitiate they undergo certain food privations.

The healer gains his power through extraordinary experiences with two or possibly three soul-children who afterwards become his helpers. Both the medicine man and his familiars are called marngit. He can, [787] in some cases, foretell the future and read a man's mind.

1: Warner E-5 (1926-1929) 1937
OI 17 Murngin OI 17

The doctor diagnoses but does not announce the findings in his case. If the illness has been caused by intrusion, he uses a gentle massage to force the foreign object within the victim's body to a certain spot where it can be sucked out by the healer. If the sick man's soul has been stolen the magician can look through his body, see that his heart is empty and his body rotten, and he immediately predicts death. He may say that a man is possessed by a mokoi, since he is deaf, dumb, or insane. Other variations in the diagnostic process will be described later. 755

A good doctor can always find out who has stolen the soul of a man murdered by magic. One means of diagnosis is to take the armlet or hair of a dead man, place it on a stick which is put in the ground, stand off at some distance, stare continuously at the stick, and concentrate upon it. The doctor then sneaks up to the stick and hits it with his spirit bag. The spirits of the magicians who have killed the man jump out and the doctor recognizes them. He then informs the victim's clansmen. Sometimes he catches the spirits of the magicians when they jump. Everyone watches him, for the performance is public. When the medicine man tells the relatives of the dead man the names of the black magicians, the kinsmen ask him to try to kill the spirits of the sorcerers. Sometimes the diagnostician takes the hairs of the magician and crushes their spirits in his hands, which is supposed to kill the sorcerers.

One of the wives of a prominent man in the camp had recently died. Amburro, one of the older white magicians, came up to the hut. He saw some of the woman's hair. He said, "Amburro has come too late. If I had come before, she would not have died. She did not die for nothing. Somebody has stolen her soul and has killed her." Amburro said to the husband, "Have you got anything that I can have that belongs to that woman?" The husband said, "Yes, I have her hair here." The husband took some of the hair and enclosed it in the palms of his hands as directed by the doctor, whom he approached, opening his hands very slowly. Amburro grabbed the hair and held it in his fist. He opened it very slowly. He looked inside. He said immediately, "Those two magicians from inside the bush did that," and he gave their names.

The Ma-tji-tji or Spirit Bag of the White Magician.—White magicians usually have a small woven bag stuffed with bush cotton and attached to a head circlet, which is placed around the head so that the bag hangs by the ear of the wearer. The familiars of the magician are 756

1; Warner E-5 (1926-1929)1937
OI 17 Murngin OI 17

156 supposed to inhabit the matjitji; and when a magician parts with a old one he first rubs it under his arms and then against the new bag t allow his spirits to enter this other bag.

[17] The natives in the western part of the territory of the eight tribe use these bags generally for good luck in hunting or to hold in thei mouths when they are fighting. Its use is not confined to the m gician (see Murngin Artifacts, Appendix II, page 478).

Willidjungo Acquires Power and Becomes a Medicine Man.—Th healer Willidjungo, one of the most active and respected white m gicians among all the tribes in northeastern Arnhem Land, was large, rather heavy-set man with a mop of straight hair. He was ver amiable and inclined to joviality. He had six wives and a number o children. He belonged to the Yandjmung linguistic group, which i in the western part of the area. He had all the abilities accredited t the ordinary healer type, but unlike a few of the magicians he coul not kill as well as cure.

One day when Willidjungo was a mature man having several wives an children he was out in the bush looking for wild honeybees' nests. Afte a time he decided to return home. On his way back to camp he felt a pai in his right leg near the hip. He knew afterwards that the familiars whic he later acquired had given it to him. His leg became very stiff and staye that way for over a week. During this time he lay in the camp and covere himself with paper bark to keep warm. One of Willidjungo's wives slep by him. The two familiars, who were a little boy and girl, started talkin to him underneath the paper bark. They talked in a rhythmic chant: "Dul dul! dul!—ter ter ter."

Said Willidjungo, "The sound was like a small frog out in the lilies.'

Willidjungo woke up his wife. "You better sleep among the wome tonight," he said. His wife left their hut and went over to her mother' and father's. She was very frightened of these two spirits. The two con tinued talking. They went back into the bush and Willidjungo followe them.

"I kept listening to that noise they were making. I listened but I di not look, and followed them. The two things came back to camp and came with them. They sat down by my fire and talked. When it was nigh and dark those two spirits flew in the tops of the trees. They had the soun of a quail flying. They sat on the top of my head and on my shoulders They had white feathers, but I did not know that at that time. I coul only feel them on my head."

Morning came. Willidjungo went out to look for food and to fish. Th spirits left and did not come back until the afternoon. "They did not com

1: Warner E-5 (1926-1929) 1937
OI 17 Murngin OI 17

back for me then but I went out to look for them. I saw them out in the bush then for the first time. Their bodies looked like jabirus. Their eyes looked like your glasses. Their face and stomach looked like a man and their legs looked the same way. They had big stomachs like children. Their arms were like wings and had little feathers on them. Their wings had big feathers. They were standing on a tree. I took my spear-thrower. I put the hooked end under my arms and put sweat on it. I took it out then to reach for those two spirits. I caught them and put them under my arms. I held them in my hands like you would a small bird when you catch a wild one. They left me before I came back to camp. Before they left they said to me, 'You have a wife. It is better that you go back by yourself.'"

Willidjungo said, "Oh, no, I don't want to do that." He then said to them, "What are your names?"

"We are two na-ri [familiars]. Don't you try to cure people yet. If people are sick you let them alone and tell some other doctor to try to cure them."

"Then I came back to camp. Dorng's daughter was sick. I did nothing but look at her. She had a big hole in her chest. It had cracked open. I kept on looking. One of the old doctors tried to fix her but he couldn't do anything, but I didn't do anything. Afterwards I took the flesh and put it together and she became better right away the first time I tried. I made her well when she was half dead. Those two spirits talked to me then. They said, 'The first time you have tried you have done a good job. The next time anyone is sick you treat them. That is your work. We gave this to you and it will help you, but there are some things you cannot do. You must not go in the salt water and get covered with it. You must go along near the shore. If you go down under the salt water, we two will be dead.'

"If I should dive in the ocean these spirits would die. These two spirits come around at night, usually in the middle of the night. Yesterday I carried a kangaroo on my shoulder and pressed hard on my armpits. I hurt one of my familiars, and I am sore under my arm. Last night the little one that was not hurt left me and went into the bush to look for another spirit. The other one followed him. The sick one said, 'My master is sick now like me. You come and we will fix him.'

"The well one took something out of the sick one and they came back. They found something hard in my chest and took it out.

"When I was getting these spirits I went around very quietly and said nothing. I did not smoke very much. I only ate vegetable food and stayed in one place. I made an old doctor my friend. I fed him and gave him tobacco. One of the spirits left him and came with me."

Amburro, one of the old doctors of the western clans, watched Willid-

1: Warner E-5 (1926-1929)1937
OI 17 Murngin OI 17

jungo's behavior very carefully. Finally he said, "He is a true doctor all right. He has some things sitting on his shoulder." Many people were skeptical about it at first, but they were convinced: Willidjungo disappeared into the bush one night, and when he came back they heard the clicking sound, a kind of beating against his shoulders. Everyone said, "He has those children there." From that time on everyone believed that he was a medicine man.

Other Powers of a White Magician.—The white magician has a number of additional powers by virtue of his familiars. The nature of these powers seems best explained by Willidjungo, the magician. All the things he claimed for himself were confirmed by his fellow tribesmen.

"When I treat people those two go right inside a man. That bone which is inside the man sticks right straight in him. I keep rubbing on the outside. Those two children of mine take hold of that bone and when I suck they jump out with it. Sometimes I can look right through a man and see that he is rotten inside. Those two go inside but they can do nothing. Sometimes when people steal a man's soul in the bush he comes here to my camp. I go look; he is empty inside. I say, 'I can't fix you up. Everything is gone. Your heart is still there, but it's empty. I can't fix you up.' Then I tell everybody he is going to die.

"Sometimes people carry a sick man to me and I see them coming a long way down the beach. I call out to those people, 'You people stand each side of him,' and I look in that man. Soon the souls of the two men who killed this sick man half dead come out. When I see this I call out the names of those two men who stole this man's soul.

"Before this, men and women have gone in the bush and have played with each other and one man's wife will be with another woman's husband. They say, 'We are going to spear kangaroo.' The man goes to spear kangaroo and then goes to find that woman. They come back. My spirit children come to me and say, 'That man and woman have played together out in the bush. You go tell that woman's husband.' I say, 'Oh, no, I won't do that. That will make trouble.' I do not tell their husbands and wives because that would make too much trouble in the camp.

"Sometimes I am sitting with a man and I look at his head and I can say to him, 'You think so and so.' The man says, 'How do you know that?' and I say, 'I can see inside your mind.' "

"Doctors like Willidjungo," I was told, "can find out about these things [soul-stealing]. They know what has happened—other people do not, they can only think, that is all." A medicine man can take the hair of a dead man, hide it in the stump of a tree and make a fire around it, after which he stands off at some distance from the fire and watches it very carefully for

1: Warner E-5 (1926-1929) 1937
OI 17 Murngin OI 17

an hour or more: the spirits of the black magicians come out in the smoke and their faces are visible. The doctor comes back to the general camp and people say to him, "You have seen somebody, haven't you?" He replies, "Oh, no, I have seen nothing." If the magicians who have killed the man are still in the camp and hear this, they leave immediately, for they know the doctor knows who has done it and that he will tell the truth presently. The doctor then tells the relatives, who gather their spears to go kill the magicians and to avenge the death of their kinsman.

An old woman had been ill for a number of days in the camp. Willidjungo came up and looked at her and said, "That woman is going to die tonight." The other people said, "How do you know?" He replied, "My spirits told me." That night the old woman died.

Willidjungo was on Millingimbi Island in the Crocodile Group one day when he said that a certain clansman was dead on the mainland. The clansman's relatives said, "How do you know that?" He replied, "My spirit children flew over to the mainland and saw it and came back and told me." That same day some men came in a canoe from the mainland and brought the news that the man was dead.

Mun-yir-yir Acquires Power and Becomes a Medicine Man.—"I found my doctor spirits in my country, in the snake country. I was out hunting for bandicoot and I had caught one and was cooking him. I think perhaps those doctor spirits smelled that bandicoot cooking. I went down to a creek to get some water to drink. I leaned over and drank out of the water hole. When I did that a doctor soul caught my nose and made me sink down in the water. I was in a coma and fell in the water. The doctors, they were two boys and a girl, took my hand and put it in a dry place [to help him up]. They took out something from inside my body when I was sick after falling in the water and they opened my eyes and nose and mouth and made me well. They blew in my mouth. I got up and took my stone axe. I hit one of those doctor souls on the nose and I hit the others, too. They looked like opossums. When I caught them, one of the men doctor souls said, 'You make us well now.'

"I blew on the man and made him well, then I made the others well. They said to me, 'Now you go back to camp. Don't you eat dog any more, but you eat cold food and don't sleep near the fire.'

"When I got near the camp those opossums called out to me. They made a loud noise. The people said, 'Look out for Munyiryir. He has found some familiars.' These familiars hit their arms against their sides and made a popping noise. I came and sat down in my camp. I slept. I slept a little while in the night and went out in the bush. Those two took me to the bush with them. I did not try to make anybody well.

"I went to Elcho Island from the Naladaer country and then came back again to the mainland. Some of the people said to me, 'We are sick here

1: Warner E-5 (1926-1929)1937
OI 17 Murngin OI 17

in the chest. We don't feel well. Please, Munyiryir, help us.' I went then and took a shell and filled it with water and washed my hands. I felt over their chests and took out a bone and showed them. A man came from another country. He had a sore back. He said, 'I can't walk.' I looked from a long way and I saw that little hard thing inside him. I blew on his back and this thing came out a long way. I showed it to him. The other man went hunting for kangaroo then and his back didn't hurt him and he was very pleased.

"Those two spirits sit down on my shoulders. Sometimes they sit on my head. I call them my children. Sometimes they used to come to me in the night. They would say, 'There is a man sick over there.'

"In the early morning I would say, 'Where is that man?' and they would show me and they would say, 'He has got something inside him,' and they would show me where. Sometimes I used to take bushes and brush against the man and now blow on him and that hard thing would fall a long way from him.

"When I first started some of the people said, 'You are lying and not telling the truth.' I said to them, 'You look in my mouth.' I opened my mouth and let them see I had nothing in there."

A Case Record of Willidjungo's Treatments and Cures.—A Birkili clansman had an ache in his back. Willidjungo was called. He gave him the usual rubbing treatment, found the place that was painful, and removed a small stick. This had been placed within him, said Willidjungo, "by a mokoi. This mokoi was a swallow which swooped down over the camp. This bird is the mokoi of some very old dead person. He was angry because the victim had a yam stick in his possession that was owned by a Burera tribesman." The Burera are somewhat distant people from the Birkili and they are looked upon with extreme suspicion as great sorcerers by the tribes to the east of them. The mokoi, according to Willidjungo, had definitely tried to kill his patient. The mokois at times act in the rôle of vampire, since they can definitely attack a living man and make him ill or take away his good sense (make him insane).

Munyiryir, a former magician, had a very heavy cold in his lungs, which might have been a slight touch of pneumonia. After he had suffered a few days with it he called Willidjungo to treat him. Willidjungo brought his paraphernalia, including the spirit bag, a container of water, and, of course, his familiars. He removed a pointed stick from Munyiryir's side. He informed him that it was caused by an old mokoi. This mokoi came in the middle of the night and stood near their two camps (their huts were close together). In the middle of the night Willidjungo awakened his two wives and told them to look at the mokoi, which was standing by a tamarind tree. Both of them said that they had seen this ghost. When

1: Warner E-5 (1926-1929) 1937
OI 17 Murngin OI 17

the ghost left, Willidjungo went back to sleep and the ghost went up to Munyiryir's and pushed the stick inside him. This was done because the victim had been given a ranga a long time back and had not returned the present to the owner of the totem. 755 753

Mahkarolla had been ill for a number of days with a very bad ache in his back which made him bend over to such an extent that he could not walk. He was in extreme pain. A number of years before he had fallen from a tree which had paralyzed his lower limbs for a short time. He sent for Willidjungo to treat him. Willidjungo arrived. He walked around him in a rather stately manner until he had covered a course of about a half circle. He then walked over to his patient, got down on his knees beside him and asked him to lie on his stomach. He washed his hands, took a mouthful of water and washed his mouth out and spat it on the ground. He felt all over the body with his fingers while examining the back carefully. He then rubbed his hand under his own armpit and again applied his hands to Mahkarolla's back. He massaged it carefully. He then removed the spirit bag from his head and rubbed it under each arm and against his head, then applied it to Mahkarolla's head and buttocks. The rubbing continued. Soon it was localized to one spot. The doctor then bent over his patient and put his mouth to the spot, in the lower part of his back. He blew against the place where the illness was supposed to be located, then sucked. He raised his mouth and spat. He spat again. He put his hand to his mouth and brought out a small stick about three inches in length and about the size of a small match in diameter. It looked like a large darning needle. Willidjungo diagnosed the case as due to a wrong that had been done his familiars, who had struck at Mahkarolla. There was probably more to it, but unfortunately this occurred when I first arrived in the field and I did not get all the details. Within two or three hours after this treatment the patient was well and walking around. He claimed that he felt all right. 755

Mahkarolla paid Willidjungo a stick of tobacco and some nut bread for the treatment. There must always be a payment made for a treatment by a magician. 756

Munyiryir, although he had been an excellent doctor and had cured a large number of people, suddenly lost his power because he unintentionally disobeyed the taboo, which, if broken, always destroys a doctor's familiars. This occurred within a few months before my arrival with the Murngin. 756 784

"I had been down," he said, "to the ocean. It was on the Goyder River side of Millingimbi Island. Those doctors of mine were sitting on my head and shoulders. I was out in a canoe standing in it when another canoe

1: Warner E-5 (1926-1929)1937
OI 17 Murngin OI 17

756 784 came along and hit our small one. I fell in the ocean and I was covered with the salt water. I heard those opossum children make noises. I put my hand on my head and they fell down inside the water when I came up. A little after that an old man was sick. 'I am sick inside here,' he said. [He touched his chest.] I looked to see what was inside him but I could see nothing now. My eye was too dark. I had lost my doctor children. I can't see anything now inside people. Everyone says that I have lost my very good thing that I had. It's too bad. I said to all the people then, 'I can't look out for you people any more. I fell down in the salt water and it covered me and I can't cure any more.' If I had fallen down in fresh water it would not have hurt those doctor children of mine."

752 755 *Diagnosing Snake Bite.*—Sometimes it is impossible for a man to determine what has stung or bitten him when he is walking bare-legged through the high grass. The Murngin feel it is always necessary to know what has caused a thing. Magicians are called in to diagnose, of which there are at least two methods. In the southern and more interior clan territories, among such people as the Ritarngo, Djimba, Gunalbingu and Dai, when a man thinks he has been bitten by a snake that has crawled away without his seeing it, he finds a hollow pandanus log. He then takes some blood from the wound, places it on a handful of grass, and sticks the grass in one end of the old pandanus tree. He lights the dry grass, blows on the smoke, and watches to see it come out the other side. The snake spirit comes out of the hole. If it looks around for food the man who is bitten will die. If it hurries away he is certain to live. By the other method of diagnosing a snake bite the magician rubs the injured part with one hand while with the other he holds a long thin grass stalk. The grass stalk is moved around the ground with great delicacy and is raised and lowered a number of times. In time some little particle of earth, a grass seed or a bit of bark, will adhere to the end of the stick. If it is only a grass seed or some tiny minute particle the magician diagnoses the bite as that of a small snake. If it is large, the snake is a large one. This diagnosis is also supposed to cure the injury.

789 *Rain Magic.*—It is not necessary to be a magician in order to make rain. Anyone can do it, providing he follows the correct procedure. No one would attempt to make rain during the dry season, since this is an improper time for it and nobody wants it then. However, if the dry season continues too long a number of people, usually ceremonial leaders of the various clans, attempt to end it. To make rain, a man gathers a large bundle of green grass and fashions a human image of

1: Warner E-5 (1926-1929) 1937
OI 17 Murngin OI 17

CHAPTER VIII

A SOCIOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF MAGIC

Section I. The Problem of Ritual and Magic Presented by the Northern and Southern Areas

Since the northeastern clans share a belief in magic but lack magical techniques and magicians, the people there either are forced to travel to the south and west for treatment by white magicians, such visits being comparatively rare, or resort to other means found within their own area.

In the south and west black and white magicians are found who have definite techniques for curing and for killing.

The social organizations of the two areas are identical; the totemic situation is the same, and in general there is little variation in the culture except for magical practices. With magical treatment absent in the north, the problem arises as to what to substitute for it, since there is the obvious necessity of attempting to cure an ailing man.

Throughout the north there is a general *belief* in black magic, but it is ascribed to sorcerers operating in the south. The relevant northern thinking on illness is not different from that in the southern area where the offending magician is also an outsider of the clan and the near kinship group. The difference is that there is no sorcerer within the northern groups to whom the people can appeal for punitive magic. It is analogous to knowing the effects of heavy artillery but not possessing it. The magical folklore of the north is sufficiently gruesome to cause the most fearsome apprehension in the minds of people who believe their illnesses caused by such practices.

The two more common accounts of black magical practices believed in throughout the northern Murngin clans and among all the surrounding tribes follow.

1. Two or three magicians follow a man when he is by himself, rush upon him, and throw a spear into him. The man falls down and the others rush upon him. He is in a kind of coma. The mouth cannot move but

1: Warner E-5 (1926-1929) 1937
OI 17 Murngin OI 17

killed by black magic is most illuminating. The sorcerer belongs to a hostile group or, what is equivalent to the Murngin mind, to one so far away that it is unknown and strange. A sorcerer of one's own clan is not asked to kill any member of it or of friendly clans, but to destroy outsiders who are looked upon as enemies and who reciprocate. The source of the enemy sorcerer's power lies within the known antagonisms which connect one's group with the foreign groups. Probably it is the foreign group's mana, as thought of by the victim and his group, which attacks a member of one's own clan through the magician's ritual. It is the enemy's magician, it must be remembered, who helps organize the local community's attitudes toward the death of its own clansman, and it is likely that he also is an organizer of the outside clan's feelings. One's own sorcerer is equally feared by his clan's enemies, and the deaths in the enemies' clans are ascribed by them to the evil worked by him. The local sorcerer is not feared by his kinsmen; rather, they go to him in times of trouble and weakness, since his power can reestablish their own and their clan's sense of well-being by killing the enemy in retaliation for the slaying of their kinsman.

The power of the black magician, then, comes (1) from the very nature of the clan itself because of its antagonism and open warfare with the people of the victim, (2) from being associated with the dead, and (3) ultimately from the action of the victim's people because of their earlier withdrawal of support from him and later thrusting him from the society.

The mana of the ceremonial leader comes from his oral and ceremonial ritual, which in turn gains its power ultimately from a society or church, viz., the clan. The mana of the medicine man comes from his ritual, in which the group must participate by its belief if his technique is to be effective, which means that his source of power is in the group. He too must have and does have his church, which in Murngin society is the group of clans.

To sum up, the power of the black magician only reverses that of the white: the healer is a member of his own or a friendly group and his magic is made effective by the positive attitude of the victim's people; on the other hand, when black magic is at work, the symbolic behavior of the victim and his people is in response to what they believe to have been the magical acts of a representative of someone outside the clans of the victim and his near kin—and even though the black magician is not present, he is the symbol around which the members of the victim's group organize their sentiments in relation to the victim.

753 754 fire, and, as the smoke ascended, he asked it to carry this coughing sickness to these people.

754 756 In this aboriginal community are men known as Gulung, or "Marrngit," who exercise magic in a curative or preventive way. Their chief function is to discover and combat the sinister purposes of the Ragalk, or of evil spirits. Neither the Ragalk nor the Marrngit occupy a position apart from the ordinary life of the people, nor do they exercise any special functions in the ceremonial life of the tribe.

628 765 778 Magic is also believed to operate through an article known as "Maiyabala." When a man dies or is killed, a scrap of one of his bones, or a piece of one of his weapons or utensils, is given by one of his near relatives to each of his friends. This article is known as a "Maiyabala," and carries with it this important significance. Every man accepting the "Maiyabala" places himself under the obligation of doing his best to avenge the death of the deceased. I have known men who have allowed themselves to be persuaded into accepting the "Maiyabala," to be later deeply troubled when they have considered the probable consequences of their action. There is no way of escaping the obligation, and these men have thus made themselves party to a serious quarrel which probably does not concern them.

[677] 765 778 When a man, in fulfilment of this obligation, kills another, he is usually relieved from personal responsibility in the matter, the magical property of the "Maiyabala," by directing the man's spear and giving strength to his throw, being regarded as the actual cause of the killing. The Maiyabala is also worn as a charm, and is believed to assist the wearer in fighting or in the pursuit of game, the idea being that the spirit of the dead man reinforces and assists that of the wearer of this relic.

775 Closely allied to the above are some of the beliefs concerning the "Mali," or lesser spirits, of men who have been killed. When a man has killed another it is believed that the "Mali" of the slain seeks to enter the person of the slayer, the idea here being that, by overcoming the man's body, the victor has also overcome his spirit, which now seeks to serve its new master. Numbers of men of my acquaintance claim to have passed through this experience.

11: Webb M-5 (ca. 1930) 1933 OI17 Murngin OI17

757 place it in the fire. It is said that within a few days at most of doing this the cough will disappear.
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The ever-present *kal-kal*, green ant, is employed as an emetic. These insects are crushed between the palms of the hands, mixed with water, and swallowed. It is said that violent vomiting is thereby produced.

For diarrhœa a small brown fungus which grows on the bark of certain trees and which is called *bulogun* is taken roasted on the coals then scraped into water, which is drunk cold. The young shoots of a tree called *narini*, chewed and eaten, are also said to give relief from this complaint.

757 Such are some of the remedies and modes of treatment employed by these aborigines in endeavouring to overcome their various complaints, injuries, and diseases. In the preparation and adminis-
[887] tration of the various remedies it is the old women who are chiefly engaged. The *marrngit*, magician, deals only with those cases
[756] where the patient's condition is believed to be directly due to the operation of evil magic.

T. THEODOR WEBB

14: Thomson E-5 (1935-1943) 1961 O117 Murngin O117

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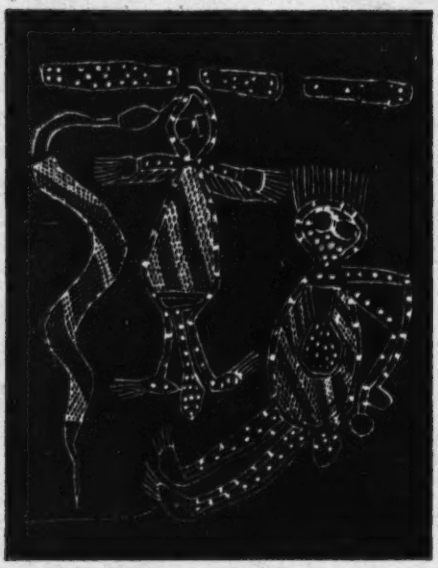
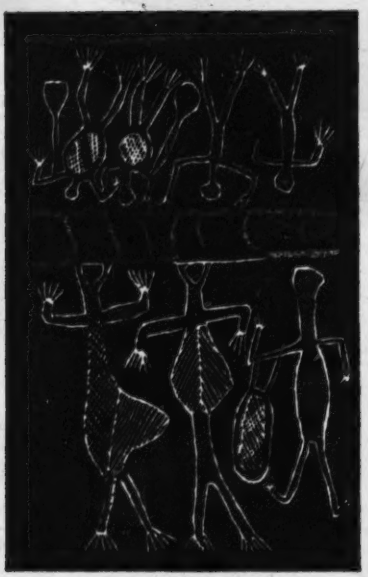


(*a*) Marngit *of Muu'nyeri'nyir of Tjamparpoingo clan. The three flat objects at the top are stones, with holes represented by spots. The winged male* marngit *is Mallagurrpallawnirr, the other his wife (and sister)* Barrambit. *They come from Guruwanna on the mainland of Arnhem Land behind Howard Island. Left, the snake* Bundango.



(*b*) *The six* marngit *of Wilindjango of Mildjingi clan, Lower Glyde River, and the 'shade'* (malli) *of the* marngitmirri *himself, lower right. Next to him are Nari, male, and Martung'dung, the female; the bulge is the womb in which she bore the four junior* marngit *above.*

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(*c*) *Wilindjango, whose* marngit *are shown in* (*b*) *above. This man was also a renowned rainmaker of his clan. The basket-like structure on his forehead is* nganak (*lit. flesh*), *dried human flesh or* mango (*blood*) *which are used in the practice of magic and ritual cannibalism. The two small wooden pegs projecting from the basket are* yel *and are made from ironwood* (Erythrophleum laboucherii). *They are part of the stock in-trade of the* marngit.

(*d*) *Sorcerer, called* ragalk *or* kalk', *Burara Tribe, Cape Stewart district, north central Arnhem Land, with* kandjurma, *stiletto-like objects sharpened to a fine point and made from ironwood called* maipin. *The* ragalk *are said to insert these* kandjurma *into the hearts of their victims by way of the neck, thence down the dorsal aorta. In this way they claim the* ragalk *draws out the blood of his victim. In Australia these* kandjurma *are popularly known as 'pointing bones.'*

'MARRNGIT,' 'MARRNGITMIRRI' AND 'KALKA'

Photographs (*a, d*): *D. F. Thomson*

[Facing p. 97]

532 131 The drawings in polychrome from north-
●756 eastern Arnhem Land that accompany this paper* were made on sheets of stringy bark (*Eucalyptus tetrodonta*) by three medicinemen, called *marngitmirri*, members of Mildjingi clan of the lower Glyde River, and of two neighbouring clans, Liagauwumirr' and Ngalladar
617 Tjambarpoingo. Mildjingi is a clan of *yiritja* moiety and Liagauwumirr' and Tjambarpoingo are members of the opposite moiety, *dua*, in which certain terminal vowels, notably *i* and *o* are elided as an arbitrary mark of distinction
[117] between clans of different moieties whose members speak similar languages. In Wanguri clan of the Arnhem Bay area the word *kulong* is applied to the medicineman.

776 In each case the figures drawn by the medicineman
787 represent the spirits called *marngit*, two or more in number, which adopt certain men, often first subjecting
756 them to an ordeal or series of ordeals, after which they are known as *marngitmirri*—medicinemen—and are vested with the special powers of this cult.

The *marngit* or spirit familiars of two of the three medicinemen from eastern Arnhem Land who claimed to be *marngitmirri* are shown in Plates I and Ja. These *marngit* were said first to have visited the men whom they later adopted, subjecting them to a series of ordeals. Sometimes they brought sickness, in other cases, according to my informants, they inflicted injuries, sometimes actually breaking bones and almost killing the novice, after which they restored him and then invited the initiate in turn to try his own skill by injuring the *marngit* and restoring him. After a more or less lengthy period of trial by way of initiation, the *marngit* finally adopted the *marngitmirri* and thenceforth helped and guided him in the practice of the cult.

756 According to most of my informants, the cult of the *marngitmirri* or medicineman in eastern Arnhem Land is restricted to men only, although it is not a sacred cult and is not secret—that is, it does not depend upon ritual or supernatural backing, and is carried out in open camp without any secrecy, in the presence of women and children. Many of the *marngit*, the spirit familiars them-
[776] selves, were said by my informants to be females. Although women do not appear to become *marngitmirri* they do
[791 practise as rainmakers. Some of the rainmakers of east
562] Arnhem Land, of whom there were three in Mildjingi clan—the clan of Wilindjango—were women, one of whom was renowned for her prowess with the rites and magical spells of the rainmaker. However, although rain-
[788] making depends upon the understanding and correct observance of certain rituals and the use of the appropriate

* *With Plates I and J*

[p. 97 (B)]

magical rites and spells, it does not involve the co-operation of spirit familiars.

The majority of informants stated that the cult of the *marrngit* is not a hereditary one, and they asserted that although the son of a *marrngitmirri* father may also be *marrngitmirri*, membership of the cult does not necessarily pass from father to son. But at least one informant of Wanguri clan, a clan of Mindjikai *barpuro*, declared that in his own clan, of which the principal territory is at Arnhem Bay, a little to the south and east of Elcho Island, the cult of the *marrngit* was hereditary and did pass from father to son. On controversial issues of this kind, long discussions often took place among the old men who acted as informants, and finally they would reach agreement and give me their verdict. Far from being careless or merely anxious to please, they took great pains to check information by referring to people who possessed specialized knowledge, and took much trouble in settling any doubtful point. My informants declared that the *marrngit* was also hereditary in the Burara tribe, where, however, the cult of the *ragalk* was also established and was certainly dominant. Some conflict, or difference of opinion, does occur in matters of this kind particularly in north-eastern Arnhem Land where there is no hard and fast, or orthodox, view, supported by a large body of opinion.

This means that, as might be expected, in the absence of a written language or an organized body to formalize belief, there is necessarily some degree of flexibility, some scope for individual ideas, and within the atypical, intensely segmentary, social organization of eastern Arnhem Land, this variability tends to be emphasized. Even in matters of kinship, which concerns the entire group, since it regulates all behaviour, differences sometimes occurred and the people would call in old men and submit an intricate or knotty problem to them in the way that I have mentioned above.

It was intended originally to confine this paper to a short account of the *marrngitmirri*, translated from the statements of the medicinemen themselves, and to follow this with descriptions of the *marrngit*, which are shown in the accompanying plates of actual drawings of their spirit familiars made by these medicinemen. But my attention has been drawn to an article by the late Revd. T. T. Webb published some years ago, 'The Making of a Marrngit,'[2] which contains some errors and misconceptions, and I have therefore extended the scope of this article to discuss the relationship of the medicineman and sorcerer in Arnhem Land and the roles and the distribution of these cults.

In the opening paragraph of this article Mr. Webb says: 'In east Arnhem Land there are two classes of magicians

[p.97(c)]

● 756 754 or medicine-men. Members of the one, whose operations are wholly of an evil character, are known as *ragalk*, while members of the other, whose operations are always of a benign character, are known as *marngit*, or less frequently *gulang*.'

This statement needs qualification, for the cults of the medicineman or *marngit* and the sorcerer or *kalka* in Arnhem Land are not quite as simple as suggested in this account, and the *marngitmirri*—that is, the medicineman, the man who has been initiated and adopted by spirit familiars called *marngit* who help him in the practice of his cult—really belongs to east Arnhem Land, and to the territory east of the Crocodile Islands, coinciding with the area that lacks a typical tribal organization. The somewhat different cult of the *ragalk* or *kalka*, the sorcerer, flourishes at Cape Stewart and to the south and west of this territory. Its stronghold is central and western Arnhem Land. Here, in the territory of the Burara tribe of Cape Stewart which lies immediately west of the Crocodile Group, and among Raimbar'ngo, Ritar'ngo and other tribes of central Arnhem Land, the cult of the *ragalk* flourishes. An informant of Wanguri clan who was linked by his totemic background with the Wallamango declared that the cult of the *marngit* did occur in the neighbouring Burara tribe. But the account given by this man was not impartial and unavoidably gave to the *marngit* of that area a kind of 'aura' of the *kalka* or sorcerer.

It will be clear from what I have said that the two cults are not complementary, except possibly in the Burara tribe. And in east Arnhem Land they certainly do not exist side by side as opposing cults among the same people, as the Revd. T. T. Webb's account implies. The sorcerer or *kalka*, although certainly known to the people east of the Crocodile Islands who live in the stronghold of the *marngitmirri*, and much feared by them as part of the magical stock-in-trade of the *warnba*, the people of the west (strangers) does not exist as a cult in eastern Arnhem Land. The fear in which the sorcerer is held by these people [757 152] resulted from the transfer of the Methodist Mission from Elcho Island, where it was first established, to Milingimbi in the Crocodile Islands—which, by coincidence, lies on the western fringe of the territory of the Burara, the very home of the *kalk*'.

756 121 The present paper is intended to give an account of the *marngitmirri* and their *marngit* and particularly to describe the way in which a man of east Arnhem Land is visited by his *marngit* and initiated as a 'medicineman,' the relationship that exists between the *marngitmirri* and his *marngit* or spirit familiars, and the way in which his *marngit* or spirit familiars test the medicineman before they adopt him. [757

The coloured plates (I, J) that accompany the paper, as I have stated, represent the *marngit* drawn by three medicinemen of east Arnhem Land. The descriptions with the plates are translations of the information given to me by the medicinemen themselves, generally in their own languages.

The Kalka *and* Ragalk

754 After I had been working for about two years in eastern Arnhem Land and knew the language well enough to

[p.98(A)]

754 speak and to hear most of what was said except when it was idiomatic or spoken very quickly, I made the following note: 'The cult of the *kalka* or *ragalk* properly belongs to the area of Arnhem Land extending from the Burara of Cape Stewart westwards. It did not exist as a cult to the east of this territory, although greatly feared by these people, but it was an important influence to the west as well as among the interior tribes, the Raimbar'ngo, the Ritar'ngo and others from the Derby Creek, lying south and west of Cape Stewart and the Liverpool River.'

And to this record, the following significant note was added: 'It was unknown to the Tjambarpoingo, the Kalbanuk and to most of the Mandjikai—the "sandfly people"—with the exception of the Wallamango, the latter a people of the Crocodile Islands who claim affinity with Mandjikai *barpuro*.' Wanguri clan is also linked with the same group. *Barpuro*[3] is a term that is difficult to define in the intricate and aberrant social grouping of this area.
617 It is applied in eastern Arnhem Land to loosely integrated clans often occupying discontinuous tracts of territory, geographically sometimes widely separated, but nevertheless having in common at least some vital and significant part of their total totemic heritage.

124 The immense complexity of this social grouping caused many lengthy digressions among informants and frequently interrupted the collection of long texts in the language to enable difficult points as to the bonds between groups to be clarified and the resultant effects upon the attitudes of
754 people made clear to me. Because the cult of the *ragalk* or
184 sorcerer was known to the Yanango of Mooroonga Island in the Crocodile Group—a clan of Maringo *mallo*—who were on the borderline between the east and the west, with many cultural differences as well as differences in social organization, the impact of the *kalka* upon them was not as sudden or as destructive as it was upon the people of Elcho Island. My informants stressed the fact that the Ritar'ngo of the interior, who occupied a big area of country lying between the Liverpool River to the north and the Wilton (a tributary of the upper Roper) in the south, knew and practised the cult of the *kalka*, as did their neighbours the Raimbar'ngo.

It will be clear from the foregoing that the two cults, the cults of the *marrngit* and the *kalka*, are not generally
[114] complementary and do not, as Mr. Webb's account implies, occur together among the same people, with the possible exception of the Yanango and Wallamango and the neighbouring Burara. But the Yanango and Wallamango are marginal groups and this has an important influence upon their attitudes towards certain culture traits, and the emphasis placed upon differences tends to exaggerate these.

756 The more or less benevolent *marrngitmirri*, the typical medicineman, a kind of general practitioner, with his spirit familiars, is characteristic of the region east of the Crocodile Islands, extending to Cape Arnhem, where the cult of the
777 *ragalk* does not exist.
754 I have stated that prior to the transfer of the Mission
177 from Elcho Island west to the Crocodile Group, the people
184 of the Tjambarpoingo (*dua* moiety) and Kopapoingo-

[P.98(B)]

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776 originally by the Djangauwo sisters—women culture
[773] heroes, who, in their progress across east Arnhem Land, thrust their yam sticks into the ground as they walked. From each of the holes caused in this way there gushed a spring of water of a special kind called *milmindjarrk*. Certain tabus restrict the drinking of *milmindjarrk* water and my informant Nyarrang declared that the swelling on his neck was due to ritual punishment in the form of a blow from the *malli* of the heavy *birlma*, used by the Djangauwo sisters whose spirits still preside over *milmindjarrk* waters. Some time later, the effect of the blow from the *malli birlma* had become manifest in the form of a swelling. It is characteristic of these people that when 'something is wrong,' when they receive a warning in the
[787] form of an omen or portent, or when 'bad luck' attends their hunting or fishing expeditions, they look back over their lives for some incident which has caused them
[152] uneasiness or concern and which they feel may have incurred the displeasure of the *malli wangarr*, the spirits of the ancestral culture heroes.

● 756 The role of the *marrngitmirri* is twofold: first, to diagnose sickness or to determine the cause of death, and secondly
[776] to find a scapegoat by the aid of his *marrngit*—who, being
[787] spirits or ghosts, possess occult powers, powers to see things not visible to mortals, which they communicate to the *marrngitmirri*, who in turn passes the information to the
[682 kin of the victim. As a rule the verdict of the *marrngitmirri* is accepted without question and the people proceed to
593] select an avenger. This will be a person within the kinship horizon of the deceased—sometimes a younger brother but often a more distant relation from a clan to which, under an extension of the kinship structure, he has special obligations, which may be reciprocal.

In the marginal area adjacent to the Burara, *i.e.* close to
[754] the territorial stronghold of the *ragalk*—the *marrngitmirri* looks at once for signs of the tell-tale magic of the dreaded *kalka*, just as a man does when seeking the reason for what he accepts as ritual punishment.

754 Even in the culturally homogeneous area of north-east
756 Arnhem Land, the beliefs and ideas about the *marrngit* and
114 *marrngitmirri*, as well as about *ragalk*, vary considerably—necessarily so, in a matter which is strongly subjective. The foregoing reference to the role of the *marrngitmirri* discounts Webb's statement (*loc. cit.*) that this man 'possesses no special influence in the life of his horde or tribe.' It must be apparent that at critical times, when the sentiments of the
[753 kin of a sick or newly deceased man are aroused as they
761] are by the pronouncements of the *marrngitmirri* (which, backed by belief in his *marrngit*, are accepted without question), his influence on the horde in which he lives is one of life and death.

The Kalka *at Work*

754 The *kalka* or sorcerer is believed to be responsible for
753 bringing about the sickness and ultimate death of his
761 victim but he does not profess to diagnose sickness or injury due to magic, which is the role only of the *marrngit*. In practice, *kalka* may operate singly but more generally they work in groups of two or three. A sorcerer is likely

754 unaware of what has happened to him, but they assert that because of their magic he is unable to tell of his experiences when he returns to camp, although he knows that he is doomed, and prepares to die.

After a more or less prolonged treatment to restore the victim and to cover external evidence of his work, particularly in obliterating the tracks to the place where the body lay, the *kalka* wraps leaves—any leaves—around the hook of the spear-thrower and waves it over the prostrate body of his victim, especially over his head. The victim stirs. My informant simulated the groans and grunts of a man awakening from a heavy sleep.

As he recovers consciousness, the victim thinks 'I have slept deeply.' He thinks 'I have slept too much.' Meanwhile the *ragalk* has hidden himself behind a tree.

'I think somebody has killed me,' *i.e.* worked magic. The *kalka* now springs out from behind the tree and frightens his victim, telling him that he is doomed and that he will die. The victim recognizes the *kalka* and threatens to kill him. He hooks his spear on his spear-thrower but he misses again and again. He has lost heart. He returns to camp, intending to tell his kin what has happened so that they can avenge him. The *kalka*, joined now by his confederates, waylays the victim, and again harries and intimidates him. The man returns to camp but is unable to tell what has happened to him. In two or three days he [152] falls sick. He feels cold and lies all the time close to a fire. He is resigned to his fate and calling his kin around him he says, 'I am going to finish' (I am going to die).

● 756 The people, who jump to conclusions, ready to see the *kalka*'s work, call on the *marrngitmirri* who holds him tightly, examining his body. He sees sores—the *malli* of the wounds made by the *kandjurma*—and he sees that the heart blood has been drained. If the *marrngitmirri* is not sure, not ready to accept responsibility for his diagnosis, he will call in others of his cult, or he will wait until [776] evening, when his *marrngit* return to him. These often leave the medicinemen during the day and return to them at night. The *marrngit* sit on his shoulders or in the *matji-tji* [145] (biting bag), a net basket made from strings and filled tightly with down feathers or with down (*ramman*). The *matji-tji* is slung around the neck and hangs down on the chest by a string. It is carried by men during formal ordeals called *makarratta*, and when fighting in single combat, when they put it in their mouths and clamp their teeth on it. *Matji-tji* are often worn by *marrngitmirri* and provide a place of refuge for their *marrngit*. The *marrngitmirri*, after initiation to the cult, is able to see his *marrngit* and talk to them. The people living in the same camp, although unable to see the *marrngit*, claim that they can hear the *kaindjarr*—the sound of swift motion—caused by their wings, or more accurately, since not all use wings as motive power, the sound of motion. The *marrngitmirri* [774 761] claim to be able to detect the work of *ragalk*, but not to heal their victims, because their heart blood has been [776 787] drained, the *birimbir* has departed and their internal organs injured or removed.

In the years that I lived with the natives in Arnhem Land I frequently saw the *marrngitmirri* at work. He claims

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776 that his *marrngit*, being spirits—supernatural beings—have
787 the power to see spirit things. The *marrngitmirri* would often approach his patient as he lay on the ground, carrying
[765] in his hand a leafy branchlet. From time to time he would sweep the air and the ground, with a forward motion and then step suddenly aside. The purpose of this was twofold—first, because the *malli* of the *ragalk* might be lurking near and would reveal itself in dodging the branch, and secondly to drive his *marrngit* inside the body. The *marrngitmirri* would then quickly approach the victim and place one hand over the mouth, the other over the anus. The natives explained that, when the medicineman had driven the *marrngit* to the sick man or dead body, they would enter by the mouth or anus and walk about inside, making a minute examination of the organs. By preventing the exit of the *marrngit* in this way, the *marrngitmirri* could make sure that their examination was a thorough one. Later the *marrngit* would tell him what they had seen, for he claims that, after being tested and adopted by the *marrngit*, unlike the lay members of his group, he is able to talk to the *marrngit* and to hear them when they speak to him.

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776 Some of the *marrngitmirri* said that their *marrngit* remained with them for a long period, often for their whole lives. Sometimes they would be absent for days when they went to look for the honey on which they were believed to subsist, in the caves among rocks which they frequent.

Wilindjango of Mildjingi, whose *marrngit* are shown in Plate J*b*, said that the *warrakan* (animals)—adding *marrngit*
[787] *warrakan*—had first come to him when he was alone in the bush. Originally he had only two. They hovered around and then sat one on each of his shoulders, and he declared that they looked like 'small pigeons.' They folded their wings like birds as they sat, but they talked like *yulngo*—humans.

All the *marrngitmirri* with whom I lived and to whom I talked about their cult, agreed that their *marrngit* had come to them suddenly and unexpectedly. Their accounts all agreed that in the beginning they had been either incapacitated by injuries inflicted by the *marrngit* and later restored by them or had been sick and made well again. Some of the *marrngitmirri* said that they had been invited by the *marrngit* in turn to test their own skill by injuring the *marrngit* and trying to restore them. They declared that this procedure, and these visits, had continued for some time—sometimes for weeks—before the *marrngit* had finally adopted them.

The medicinemen, in talking of their *marrngit*, referred to them as *warrakan* bird (or animal) or *warrakan kulong*, and declared that the *marrngit* often addressed the man whom they had adopted by the kinship term *papa* (father). Sometimes the medicineman applied the term *yoto*, child, to his *marrngit*.

The accounts given by several *marrngitmirri* agree in saying that their *marrngit* did not remain with them continuously but that they visited their *marrngitmirri* in his camp early in the morning and at evening, sometimes

remaining with him all night. None of the medicinemen that I met in east Arnhem Land claimed to have a single *marrngit* only, and the number varied from two to four or five or even more, as in the case of Wilindjango, who had six (Plate Jb).

The *marrngitmirri*, as he gains experience in the cult, is able to see on the body of a victim of secret killing spear wounds which are not visible to ordinary people.

As the drawings in colour in Plates I and J indicate, there is a considerable variation in the concepts of the *marrngit* entertained by the *marrngitmirri*, but all agreed that these are *wakkinngu*—profane, in the sense of non-sacred, with the special implication that they are not associated with, or dedicated to, the *wangarr*, and so not subject to ritual or supernatural sanctions. The *marrngit* and their cult are regarded, therefore, by the natives of Arnhem Land as apart altogether from totemism. This essential distinction was pointed out to me by my informants themselves. They emphasized it frequently by referring to their *marrngit* as *warrakan*—animals—a term that they never used for their totems, except in reference to the actual animal form which the totems sometimes assumed in ancestral times—for, being *wangarr*, they had supernatural powers and were not subject to the restrictions and limitations of ordinary men. They were *wangarr*, hence supernatural.

The people always described their totems as *malli wangarr*—the spirits or shades of the ancestral culture heroes—and therefore, *yarkomirri*, literally with, or having, a name, dedicated ceremonially to the *wangarr*. On ceremonial occasions the obligatory presentations of *ngata* (food) are dedicated to the *wangarr* concerned by the *dalkarramirri*, who acts in the role of high priest. And because of their association with the *wangarr*, all totems or totemic objects are subject to supernatural sanctions and are still watched over by the *malli* of these *wangarr* who guard jealously the observance of the rituals associated with the heritage that they left behind.

The demarcation between what is sacred and what is profane, between *yarkomirri* and *wakkinngu*, emphasizes the recognition by these people of the essential distinction between *marrngit* and totem, between religion and magic.

Notes

[1] The data presented in the paper were obtained when I was under commission by the Commonwealth Government in Arnhem Land, prior to the war, and during the war while O.C. Northern Territory Coastal Patrol and the Special Reconnaissance Unit, Norforce.

[2] *Oceania*, Vol. I, 1936, pp. 336–41.

[3] See Donald F. Thomson, 'Two Painted Skulls from Arnhem Land, with Notes on the Totemic Significance of the Designs.' *Man*, 1939, 1.

[4] *Tortork* is heart in the strictly anatomical sense, but some of my informants declared that it was also the seat of the *malli*, or shade, a kind of non-material or spiritual manifestation, which has nothing to do with the shadow.

[p.102(B)]

15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957
O117 Murngin O117

CHAPTER TEN

Medicine-Men and Magic

MAGIC, superstition, and credulity are inseparable from Stone Age medical practices. Healing magic is in the hands of a benevolent witch-doctor known as a 'marrnggit'. His name comes from the common word 'marrnggi', denoting knowledge, understanding, and insight. Good marrnggits are few and far between; their power and influence develop with age and astuteness. In almost every small horde, one man lays claim to supernatural powers, and although not professing to have the full inspiration of a genuine marrnggit he will massage a stomach for diarrhoea or claim to suck out a mouthful of animal bones, pebbles, and blood from painful kidneys. A marrnggit is not made by choice, for the calling is by inspiration, and a mythical animal, resembling a small honey-squirrel and known as a 'manggata', enters a man and transforms him into a marrnggit. Even so, a fully developed marrnggit cannot diagnose sickness or see an evil spirit; the little manggata does it for him.

Wattia was a good marrnggit, and it all began one day when he was asleep in his camp and a manggata came to him. The animal won his attention by digging a hole in his skull, but fortunately leaving the job half done. He returned later, when Wattia was seriously ill, and exercised his healing 'medicine'. As Wattia recovered, the manggata came the third time, and said: 'Do you remember that sickness? It was I who hit you and then returned and healed you. You know now that I have the power to kill and to heal.' Wattia talked with the manggata and admitted his claims, whereupon the spirit-animal took possession of his body and

15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957
O117 Murngin O117

settled in his heart. Wattia immediately felt new strength and the desire to heal sickness in his friends. But he still did not know how to go about it, till another marrnggit came along and recognized the manggata in Wattia. He said: 'Wattia, you have a manggata there.'

'Yes, I know, he is new, and I have not worked with him.'

Shortly afterwards a woman was taken ill, and the visiting marrnggit told Wattia to test his skill: 'Wattia, you go and heal her and I will stand by and watch.'

Not having the least idea of what he should do, Wattia relied on the manggata who showed him the sickness, and as a result of his treatment the woman recovered. A few days afterwards, Wattia cured a child, and since that time his services have been much in demand. But to this day he cannot see the sickness or bring about the cures himself, this is the work of his manggata.

Credulity is the most potent factor in recovery, and it may be safely surmised that most cases of sickness recover in spite of native treatment. Aborigines have far greater respect for the effectiveness of their own practices than for European methods, even though the latter may bring about dramatic cures and prevent death. I remember the morning a young infant was brought to me with scarcely a square inch of unbroken skin on its body. The wounds had the appearance of acid burns, and it seemed that the child had been sleeping near a fire where women had been roasting cashew nuts. I treated the child for acid burns, and in about a week's time there was a decided improvement. But on the morning the infant disappeared, I was told that the mother had gone into the bush with the child because it had been 'cured' by the local marrnggit. He claimed to have removed an octopus from inside the victim, and he explained his diagnosis to me as he waited at the dispensary for a dose of cough mixture for himself! He said that a large octopus had entered the child's stomach whilst the mother was

15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957
O117 Murngin O117

victim will surely die. Hanging the reptile is part of the cure, and it is thus held hostage for the life of its victim. If the man recovers, the snake is released. It must not be killed even after the man's recovery, for if it were killed the victim would suffer a relapse and die.

Young Geitbapoi was bitten by a snake, and his mother saved his life by capturing the snake and hanging it in a tree. The snake appeared to be dying; the boy's condition also grew worse, and death was expected. But the snake passed a lot of what was said to be the boy's blood, and this was incontrovertible evidence of the reptile's recovery, and likewise its victim's. Therefore the snake was released, and in an hour or so the youth stood up and walked.

Power to kill by magic belongs to an evil witch-doctor known as a 'raggalk', who waylays the man and causes a deep sleep to fall on him so that he may squeeze blood out of his heart. Despite this, the victim lives an ordinary life till the raggalk decides to finish his work by sending a snake to bite him. As with ordinary snake-bite, the raggalk's victim tries to find the snake, to effect a recovery, but such a search is never successful, for the raggalk whisks away his instrument of death. For this reason, when a snake cannot be found after it has bitten someone, the injury it has inflicted is attributed to a raggalk. A marrnggit, or benevolent witch-doctor, can prove that a man has been bitten by a raggalk-snake by lighting a small smoke-fire, seating the man near it and blowing the smoke over him through a hollow pandanus palm-stem. In the curling smoke he sees the spirit of the raggalk emerging from the victim; he announces the name of the killer, and adds that nothing can save the life of the man.

Scorpions, stingray, and jellyfish are numerous, but their stings, though extremely painful, are seldom fatal. Scorpions attack women as they dig for yams among the stones on hillsides, and it is said that the groin or arm glands swell

15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957
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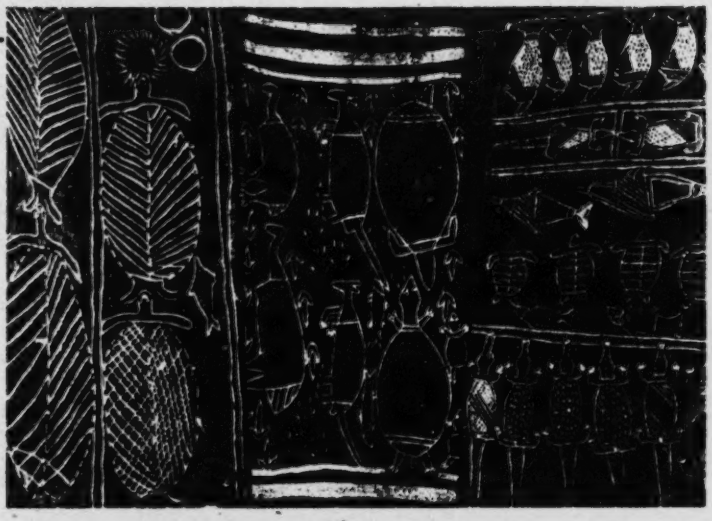

BARK PAINTINGS

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A WITCH DOCTOR
or 'Marrngitt'

[facing p87]

15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957
O117 Murngin O117

754 several women and children were dead; other sufferers were retching, and rolling on the beach in agony.

When an epidemic of whooping cough from Darwin swept eastwards through Arnhem Land and caused many deaths, [164] a horde on the Crocodile Islands explained that an enemy [776] had released the curse from a tree containing the spirit of the common cough. By stripping the bark from the tree he uncovered the evil spirit and sent it to the camps of his enemies to afflict them. On the other hand he could have broken up the tree, burnt it, and sent the smoke to blow over them.

754 Old Manimba, lame and half-blind, was familiar with 753 magical arts and an acknowledged rain-maker. He also 789 claimed to have control over mosquitoes and boils. Spirits 825 of both plagues inhabit the pandanus palm, and when these [776] prickly fronds drop off in the wet season the mosquito and boil spirits are released to swarm over the land. Manimba usually gets what he wants by threatening to send some sort of plague. To rouse unseasonal mosquitoes he pulls a green pandanus frond and instructs its mosquito-spirit to swarm into the country of his enemies, and it is done. He can call up boils by making a fire under the palm and directing the smoke to blow over and inflict certain camps.

754 Death in any but the very young or old is attributed to evil 761 magic and the first consideration is to fix the blame, for 787 someone must die for it. When a man is killed his lesser [775] spirit follows the killer. Marrngeit, or benevolent witch-[756] doctors, claim to be able to see these enslaved ghosts, and they are called on for an opinion. They sometimes make startling revelations to the relatives, though not always without serving their own ends. I remember one marrngeit acted on his own initiative, and asked the relatives: 'Do you know why your brother died?' And when interest and suspicion were fully aroused, he continued, 'I have seen his "mali". It is following Jimunboi, and he must